8. **[Amended]** The polynucleotide of claim [1] 3, further comprising a sequence encoding a heterologous target protein.

12. **[Amended]** The polynucleotide of claim 2, wherein the yeast [protein] is [from] a *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, *Schizosaccharomyces pombe*, *Yarrowia lipolytica*, *Pichia pastoris*, *Hansenula polymorpha*, or *Kluyveromyces lactis*.

14. **[Amended]** [The expression vector of claim 13] A polynucleotide expression vector comprising a polynucleotide encoding a functional Vff2p, [where in] wherein the Vff2p comprises SEQ ID NO:2, or a variant thereof, and wherein the Vff2p is a yeast protein involved in the secretory pathway and/or involved in the required cellular machinery for membrane fusion.

15. **[Amended]** The expression vector of claim [13] 14, comprising SEQ ID NO:1, or a variant thereof.

16. **[Amended]** The expression vector of claim [13] 14, wherein the protein is about 32 kD.

17. **[Amended]** The expression vector of claim [13] 14, further comprising a promoter sequence operatively linked to the sequence encoding the Vff2p.

19. **[Amended]** The expression vector of claim [13] 14, further comprising a sequence encoding a heterologous target protein.

23. **[Amended]** The expression vector of claim 22, wherein the [protein] yeast ~~is [from]~~ *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, *Schizosaccharomyces pombe*, *Yarrowia lipolytica*, *Pichia pastoris*, *Hansenula polymorpha*, or *Kluyveromyces lactis*.

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25. **[Amended]** [The host cell of claim 24] A recombinant host cell comprising a yeast cell genetically altered to express a protein encoded by a polynucleotide sequence encoding a functional Vff2p, [where in] wherein the Vff2p comprises SEQ ID NO:2, or a variant thereof, and wherein the Vff2p is a yeast protein involved in the secretory pathway and/or involved in the required cellular machinery for membrane fusion.

26. **[Amended]** The host cell of claim [24] 25, comprising SEQ ID NO:1, or a variant thereof.

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29. **[Amended]** The host cell of claim [28] 25, wherein the yeast cell is a *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, *Schizosaccharomyces pombe*, *Yarrowia lipolytica*, *Pichia pastoris*, *Hansenula polymorpha*, or *Kluyveromyces lactis* cell.

30. **[Amended]** The host cell of claim [28] 25, wherein the host cell lacks a functional protein involved in the secretory pathway and/or involved in the required cellular machinery for membrane fusion, other than Vff2p.

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31. **[Amended]** A method for increasing [protein production in] cell growth of a host cell, comprising introducing Vff2p [to] into the cell and culturing the cell, wherein the Vff2p has at least 40% homology to SEQ ID NO:2.

32. **[Amended]** The method for increasing [protein production in] cell growth of a cell according to claim 31, wherein [a polynucleotide encoding Vff2p is introduced into the host cell and thereafter, culturing] the host cell is cultured under conditions effective to allow expression of the encoded Vff2p.

33. **[Amended]** A method for increasing protein secretion from a host cell, comprising introducing Vff2p [to] into the cell and culturing the cell, wherein the Vff2p has at least 40% homology to SEQ ID NO:2.

34. **[Amended]** The method for increasing protein secretion from a cell according to claim 33, wherein [a polynucleotide encoding Vff2p is introduced into the host cell and thereafter, culturing] the host cell is cultured under conditions effective to allow expression of the encoded Vff2p.

36. **[Amended]** An isolated functional vesicular fusion factor 2 protein [The protein of claim 35 having an amino acid sequence] comprising SEQ ID NO:2, or a variant thereof, and wherein the Vff2p is a yeast protein involved in the secretory pathway and/or involved in the required cellular machinery for membrane fusion.

37. **[Amended]** A method of selecting for a yeast secretory mutant cell containing a polynucleotide sequence encoding a Vff2p[, or a structural homolog of Vff2p,] operably linked to a promoter, wherein the Vff2p comprises SEQ ID NO:2, or a variant thereof, the method comprising growing the secretory mutant cell at a restrictive temperature of about 32-37°C, wherein the restrictive temperature selectively favors mutant cell growth.

Please add the following new claims:

43. [New] The polynucleotide of claim 3, wherein the Vff2p comprises SEQ ID NO:2.

44. [New] The protein of claim 25, wherein the yeast is *S. cerevisiae*.

45. [New] The protein of claim 36, wherein the protein is from *S. cerevisiae*.

46. [New] The method of claim 37, wherein the yeast cell is a *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, *Schizosaccharomyces pombe*, *Yarrowia lipolytica*, *Pichia pastoris*, *Hansenula polymorpha*, or *Kluyveromyces lactis* cell.